

2020



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First Edition,

Published by :

The University of Salford,
Salford, Greater Manchester,
M5 4WT,
United Kingdom

ISBN 978-1912337446

Design & Layout: Ian Clegg
Images: Angela Tait, Ian Clegg

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Wednesday 10.38am

I'm afraid...

Well, maybe not afraid, but disconcerted, unsettled, a little perturbed. The ground beneath my feet feels unstable, a bit like one of those fairground attractions I remember from my childhood with the sliding floors and wonky mirrors.

Yesterday the university I work for cancelled most of the face-to-face teaching due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. I walked out of the building with as much of my desk as I could fit in my rucksack; a laptop, some vital paperwork, a print I'd swapped with a colleague and as much of the library as I could carry. I abandoned my favourite mug, watered the plants and left, wondering if we'd be back in September complete with a cohort of shiny new undergraduates or if the whole place would be opened up in fifty years like a giant time capsule.

So now as I write, the financial markets are in freefall and social media is divided between predictions of the apocalypse, people wanting virtual validation of their integrity for checking on elderly neighbours and, satirical (dark, but amusing) memes. Fake news abounds and the capacity for human lunacy is astonishing. I'm trying to take the wide view with as much logical pragmatism as I can muster, applying a degree of criticality to everything I read. That said, I did panic buy three packets of biscuits yesterday in the supermarket, but who doesn't need a Jammie Wagon Wheel in a time of crisis?



On the train on my way home I hatched a plan; I feel the need to document events as they unfold.

What if I keep a diary? Not the traditional written kind, but one made of objects – a cup(?) - every day for as long as necessary. The global context is larger than I can deal with. We could lose people we love; some already have. Jobs, businesses, livelihoods will inevitably be damaged and the effects of this level of disruption might rumble on for years. But what about the minutiae? How will we remember that? The actual lived experience of a global event plotted as it unravels. If nothing else it will give me something to focus on during what promises to be a challenging time.

I'm starting today. My new year's resolutions have historically lasted on average three to four days, so I'm sceptical about my own ability to maintain momentum. Nevertheless, here goes...

16 Monday 9.35

17 Tuesday



18 Wednesday

Day 1

A List:

- Schools to close
- Ran outside
- Scaffolding on house
- No writing
- Worried about students



19 Thursday

Day 2

The Pandictionary

- Social distancing
- Stimulus package
- Lockdown
- Panic buying

Friday 20

Day 3

Z is home, we made today's pot together



Saturday 21

Day 4

I planted seeds and someone gave me a cactus



Sunday 22

Day 5

I find myself vacillating between infinite admiration of the human spirit and overwhelming frustration at the capacity of people to be pillocks



Notes



23 Monday

Day 6

Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives



24 Tuesday

Day 7

LOCKDOWN

9.29



25 Wednesday

Day 8

Sunshine, reflecting the weather and my mood



26 Thursday

Day 9

Last night the owls were really loud and the birds today are springtime frisky

Friday

27

Day 10

In a day with one piece of bad news after another, back-to-back meetings and tensions everywhere, I managed to peg out the washing and some of it actually dried



Saturday

28

Day 11

Potters' playtime has been postponed so Geoff challenged everyone to make a pot with 75 grams of clay



Sunday

29

Day 12

We are allowed out once a day to exercise

I own a bike – who knew?



Notes



30 Monday

Day 13

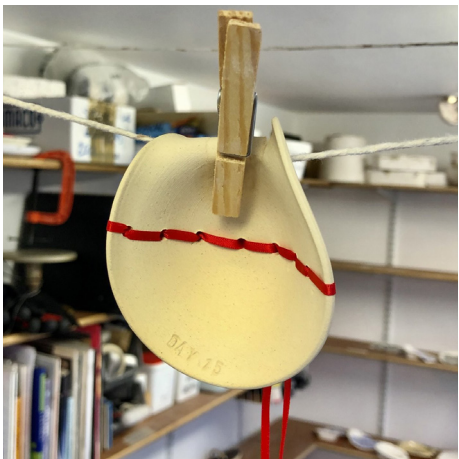
I asked Z what cup I should make, he said the most boring cup in the world. I think he's fed-up



31 Tuesday

Day 14

We're shopping for several other people. Some of the things we're asked for are a bit random



1 Wednesday

10.22

Day 15

Developing new work



2 Thursday

Day 16

I made soup

Friday 3

Day 17

Family poker night



Saturday 4

Day 18

I have been pondering the way my brain flits from ceramics to emails to cooking and meetings all in the same physical space



Sunday 5

Day 19

Reflecting upon how our relationship to food has changed.

More family eating together but also more snacking and drinking



Notes



6

Monday

Day 20

Today I worked on assessments and gave blood. A+ is both my blood group and the highest grade we give



7

Tuesday

Day 21

The last 24 hours have been lumpy with family wobbles

O 2.36



8

Wednesday

Day 22

Sometimes my brain feels like this



9

Thursday

Day 23

The way we stay in touch is changing

Friday

10

Day 24

Children throughout the country are making rainbows for their windows to be cheerful and support the NHS



Saturday

11

Day 25

There are huge bees in the garden and less cars on the road

The world is taking a breath



Sunday

12

Day 26

Easter Sunday



Notes



13

Monday

🌸 Bank Holiday, U.K.

Day 27

Threads of thinking, all overlapping



14

Tuesday

22.57

Day 28

Today, all I have done, all day, is type

Oh, and I put the bins out



15

Wednesday

Day 29

Today I have been grumpy



16

Thursday

Day 30

This morning as I was sitting in bed answering work emails I realised how overlapped my domestic and public worlds have become

Friday

17

Day 31

The WiFi went down and had to be reset



Saturday

18

Day 32

PPE is the centre of the news. There's not enough — or perhaps there is but it's all in the wrong place



Sunday

19

Day 33

Practically all that is holding the world together



Notes



20 Monday

Day 34

It's my birthday. I'm usually really rubbish at birthdays but this one was quite nice

Which house has no wrapping paper but a load of old flight maps?



21 Tuesday

Day 35

Oil is negatively priced for the first time ever. The oil companies are paying for it to be taken off their hands



22 Wednesday

Day 36

Bottomless emails – Answer ten receive twelve more



23 Thursday

Day 37

Tutorials all day. I made my own head hurt with talking too loudly

Friday

24

Day 38

I deconstructed my studio installation. Now I have a big pile of ribbon



Saturday

25

Day 39

813 COVID deaths in the last 24 hours



Sunday

26

Day 40

A family raku firing



Notes



27 Monday

Day 41

I tried to take more breaks from work but this just resulted in walking backwards and forwards between the office and the washing line



28 Tuesday

Day 42

The way we exercise has changed. I'm a 3 spin class a week kind of girl, but I've been running, cycling and walking for miles



29 Wednesday

Day 43

I started to embroider another Sky dish



30 Thursday

Day 44

H replaced the thermocouples in the big kiln

Friday 1

Day 45

I've been thinking about how my diary is mediated through the idea that it's going to be public property



Saturday 2

Day 46

Batch cooking and three separate conversations about salt



Sunday 3

Day 47

IT and I got negative COVID tests. I exercised, I spent time pottering in the garden — the bluebells are out, I baked biscuits, I drank coffee, I walked



Notes



4

Monday

✿ Bank Holiday, U.K.

Day 48

In praise of denim



5

Tuesday

Day 49

The new breakfast bar stools came. H screwed them together. One didn't fit. He unscrewed it and then had to put it back together again because the company needed pictures of it not fitting



6

Wednesday

Day 50

Nothing much happening.

It's very VERY sunny



7

Thursday

Day 51

I have been sewing a lot, and so have other people. The resurgence of craft is heartening

Friday

8

Day 52

A found sculpture on our walk



Saturday

9

Day 53

Made a pot to match my hair



Sunday

10

Day 54

Our domestic appliances work relentlessly in their endless quest to maintain us



Notes



11 Monday
Day 55
Stay alert, control the virus, save lives



12 Tuesday
Day 56
Endless typewriting



13 Wednesday
Day 57
The new normal



14 Thursday
Day 58
Internal dialogues

Friday 15
Day 59
We're trying to have take-out once a week to support local businesses



Saturday 16
Day 60
We're communicating in different ways



Sunday 17
Day 61
Changes in the way we eat are reflected in a collaborative project I'm involved in





18 Monday

Day 62

My love/hate relationship with technology



19 Tuesday

Day 63

The airfield partially re-opened.



20 Wednesday

Day 64

We're actively discouraged from using public transport for the first time I can remember. How will I get to work?



21 Thursday

Day 65

Pollocks to that — reading student essays about painting

Friday 22

● 17.40

Day 66

A lumpy day



Saturday 23

Day 67

Oh my goodness it's windy



Sunday 24

Day 68

The way we consume goods has changed



Notes



25 Monday
🌸 Bank Holiday, U.K.
Day 69

The cracks are starting to show



26 Tuesday
Day 70
I'm trying a different way of working



27 Wednesday
Day 71
We had a lovely doggie visitor



28 Thursday
Day 72
Today is the last clap for carers, a strange and controversial ritual which has developed over the lockdown

Friday 29
Day 73

I am frantically reading theory module essay submissions. I read a lovely one this morning about Rebecca Warren



Saturday 30
3.31
Day 74

Made using the cabbage from the seeds I planted on day four. The garden is looking spectacular



Sunday 31
Day 75
#BLM



Notes



1

Monday

Day 76

First day of the relaxing of lockdown restrictions. We are now allowed to mix with other families in our own gardens. I have been pondering charity shops, drinking coffee with friends and together/apartness



2

Tuesday

Day 77

It feels a little like the days are on 24 hour repeat



3

Wednesday

Day 78

I left some pots outside overnight, but it rained



4

Thursday

Day 79

Public me and Private me

Friday

5

Day 80

We had visitors for an appropriately distanced barbeque.

Six people in the same space



Saturday

6

Day 81

I made H a cup of tea and took him two chocolate hobnobs. He said, 'Thanks Mam' like I'd just given him one of my kidneys



Sunday

7

Day 82

77 COVID deaths



Notes

Sunday 7th June, 2020

*Time ticks by it always does,
It never wants to wait for us,
It always wants to race us there,
And then it's gone, but why, and where?*

(The Sloth's Shoes, Jeanne Willis)

Even before we locked down, it was clear we were about to experience something life-altering. As I headed home on the 17th of March I already had a vague notion that I would make a diary, a cup every day to document my own experience and some of the wider social, political and cultural happenings of the pandemic. As I write we're on day 81. I've just opened my last bag of clay - I allocated 50 kilos of a creamy coloured, slightly speckled stoneware – and I plan to stop on the 15th June (day 90) when some children will be invited back to school and non-essential shops can start to reopen.

I have made dozens of vessels; some resemble cups, others are unrecognisable, like the one I ran over with my bike because the way we exercise has changed. Many are thrown on the potters' wheel, others built from slabs with embossed detail. On day 48 I made the 'ode to denim' when I realised that I'd worn the same two pairs of shorts for two months straight. I rolled an old pair of jeans over the clay to leave a relief pattern complete with pocket detail and belt loops and then used the slab to construct a rudimentary vessel shape. The piece was finished with a wash of manganese to bring out the details. Others in the collection are part-glazed from a limited palette, and a rare few have some gold lustre detail or fired-on decals.

There is narrative, abstraction, metaphor and some subtle (and more blatant) art history references.

Since March 17th, time has been difficult to understand. Looking back, lockdown seems like somewhere between a heartbeat and an eternity. In one way we've lost a whole season. The summer is here, the baby birds have fledged and the blossom has gone, replaced by tiny fruits ready to swell. What happened to spring and those rituals we associate with it? Easter holidays, degree shows and the end of the university year. Viewed differently we've been at home forever. Our old routines have morphed into new rituals which have become so ingrained we are almost institutionalised by them. My time has narrowed. A 24 hour cycle is pretty much on repeat.

I see the same people, work in the same place and eat the same regular three meals (plus snacks). Looking back before lockdown is disconcerting. I struggle to feel nostalgia for hugging friends and traveling to work on the sweaty packed train, because we currently have no way to know when the old normal might return. But if looking back is awkward, projecting forward is virtually impossible. We don't yet know if every child can go to school in September or when our next holiday might be. Will we be able to have Christmas dinner with our loved ones or will that be a facsimile this year mediated by a screen and an increasingly popular meetings app?

As the diary grows I start to reflect and the early entries seem like another world. Day two was called the 'Pandictionary' and considered the new language we were being introduced to; social distancing, panic buying and stimulus packages. Today it seems ludicrous that people were stockpiling toilet roll and pasta - it seemed bonkers at the time to me anyway.

Some of the pieces have new significance as time trundles along its narrow track. On the 18th of April, day 32, I made a gravy jug with its own tiny facemask. There simply wasn't enough protective equipment for our caring staff in the hospitals and the care homes. Everyone blamed everyone else and the issue dominated the daily news conference for several days. Nearly 50 days later and I have made a couple of dozen masks from reclaimed fabric (my Mother's old pastel coloured cotton capri pants mostly) and it has just been announced that masks will be compulsory on public transport. Artists have adopted the mask to make political or satirical comments and wearing in public is commonplace.

It seems even the concept of time through my diary is fluid. What should be a robust daily measure, like a clock or a calendar, is a flexible and ever moving beast within which meanings are not yet settled.

This will finish; humanity is resilient and some patches of the old normal will resume. For now the timing is uncertain and so I plod, one foot in front of the other through the days, mostly smiling, but on the inside trying to process the nonsense in a wibbly wobbly world where everything we know is like a ball of slime dripping through a sieve.



8

Monday

Day 83

Found objects from our walks



9

Tuesday

Day 84

I was approached by a local vicar, I barely know her. She asked me to make her a ceramic chalice. I bumbled something about speaking after lockdown and then kicked myself all afternoon. Today is about my inability to say no



10

Wednesday

Day 85

The carpet man came



11

Thursday

Day 86

Nothing much happened today

Friday 12

Day 87

Toasties are ace



6.24 Saturday 13

Day 88

My bike has a puncture



Sunday 14

Day 89

We're all contemplating the new normal and wondering what happened to the old normal we liked



Notes



15 Monday

Day 90

This is not over

16 Tuesday

17 Wednesday

18 Thursday



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ISBN 978-1912337446